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SUBJECT: NIGER: TOLERANCE FOR EVANGELIST DR. RICHARD ROBERTS'
JANUARY 24-27 "MIRACLE AND HEALING" CRUSADE

¶1. Summary. The Republic of Niger laid out the welcome mat for the January 24-27 visit of Oral Roberts University (ORU) President and Evangelist Dr. Richard Roberts and his delegation. Print and broadcast media, notably "Le Sahel" (government newspaper) and "Tele-Sahel" (the national news station), covered the event, publicized as a "Miracle and Healing" crusade, and reported on Roberts' audience with President Tandja. Roberts also met with several Government of Niger (GON) Cabinet Ministers and stopped by US Embassy Niamey to pay a call on the Ambassador (AMB). The Embassy has not learned of any reports of opposition to this high-profile Christian event and has been struck by the star treatment granted to a prominent Christian leader in this predominantly Muslim (95%) nation, to include a siren police escort (usually reserved for Heads of State or Government) to facilitate Roberts' travel around town. End summary.

¶2. Dr. Roberts and a few delegation members (U.S. and local) met with the AMB and Management Officer (MO) on the afternoon of January 24. He informed EmbOffs that Niger is one of forty countries he was "called" to visit some thirty years ago. He mentioned having made an emergency stop in Niger (Agadez region) in 2005, when his chartered plane experienced engine trouble en route from Ghana to London. The ORU delegation included university students (a choir) to perform at the evening rallies and a team of medical doctors and dentists to offer services and distribute pharmaceuticals at a three-day medical clinic. Roberts also announced at the January 24 opening ceremony (attended by AMB and MO) that ORU would provide full four-year scholarships (covering room and board, tuition, etc.) for two Nigerien Christian students. Tele-Sahel, in addition to airing coverage of Roberts' meeting with President Tandja, also broadcast spot reports on the crusade's opening ceremony and the next day's initial "healing and miracle" rally.

¶3. Roberts met, upon arrival in Niger, Minister of Interior and Decentralization Mounkaila Modi, whose services provided the VIP escort and security for the nightly rallies. Three of four Cabinet Ministers, none of them male, apparently were tasked to attend the crusade opening ceremony, as when Ambassador inquired of one Minister whether she was attending the crusade as a Christian, that Minister responded her attendance was related to religious activities falling under her Ministry's jurisdiction. The four Cabinet level attendees at the opening ceremony were Minister of Population and Social Action Boukari Zila Mahamadou, Minister of Privatization Gazobi Laouali Rahamou (a Christian pastor), Minister of Labor Kanda Siptey and Minister of Women's Promotion and Child Protection Ousmane Zeinabou Moulay. Other prominent personalities in attendance at the opening ceremony were: First Lady Laraba Tandja, the Governor of Niamey, and the senior Cabinet advisors for the President and Prime Minister.

¶4. The crusade, with only one night remaining, has proceeded peaceably. An Embassy local employee reported hearing on a national television broadcast one young woman questioning a Muslim audience in a local language (Zarma) why Nigeriens should be led astray by some foreigner who promotes worship that is different from Allah's way. We have not learned of any negative reactions, such as protests to Roberts' visit.

15. EmbOffs have been struck by the level of accommodation provided to the ORU delegation in this Muslim nation. Whether the Nigeriens' hospitality to Evangelist Roberts and his entourage can be attributed to interest in the humanitarian package of doctors/dentists and medical supplies, general curiosity, an assessment that Christian numbers in Niger are too inconsequential to be concerned about a "Miracle and Healing" crusade, or the Nigeriens' usual warm welcome for visitors, for the several thousands who have attended nightly the Christian-sponsored event, the bottom line is that religious tolerance has reigned.

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